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SUBJECT: TURKEY WWF AND TRILATERAL WATER TALKS

REF. A) ISTANBUL 245, B) ANKARA 639, C) ANKARA 16

11. SUMMARY: (SBU) The Turkish MFA was pleased with the kick-off planning meeting for the 2009 World Water Forum (WWF) conference in Istanbul (ref A) and the subsequent "River Basin Management" Conference in Antalya. On the margins of the latter, Turkish, Iraqi, and Syrian ministers restarted trilateral water discussions, dormant since 1992. With the announcement of approval by Austrian, Swiss, and German export agencies, Turkey is poised to start construction of the Ilisu Dam on the Tigris. According to a Turkish MFA rep, Iraq and Syria did not express any opposition to Ilisu Dam. The MFA rep also asked us to resubmit our proposal for the Turkey-Iraq water VolVis program, noting that he thought MFA could view it favorably, but regretting that Syria was not invited. End Summary.

World Water Forum Gig 2009 in Istanbul

12. (SBU) Turkish Foreign Ministry Deputy Director General for Water and Energy Vural Altay told us March 30 that he was pleased with the March 19-20 World Water Forum (WWF) kick-off planning meeting in Istanbul (ref A). He noted that the municipality of Istanbul, the State Water Administration (DSI), the World Water Council, and the GOT MFA would be working together to plan the 2009 WWF in Istanbul. He implied that the GOT had not yet given detailed thought to their objectives, other than to successfully host the big event aimed at 20,000 participants. MFA would in particular be involved with organizing the Ministerial conference associated with the WWF. Altay said that the WWF Secretary General would be Oktay Tabasaran, a recently retired Turkish-German academic apparently resident in Germany.

Turkey-Iraq-Syria Trilateral Talks on Water

13. (SBU) Altay also expressed satisfaction with the subsequent "River Basin Management" Conference held in Antalya March 22-24, attended by 700 participants from 70 countries. For Turkey, the most remarkable result was a meeting of the ministers responsible for transboundary water issues from Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Altay said the three agreed to restart trilateral technical meetings on transboundary water in Damascus in May -- dormant since 1992 -- and the ministers would meet again in Damascus in June. Altay reiterated that the GOT had provided information repeatedly about Ilisu Dam to its downstream neighbors and insisted that the Iraqis said they had nothing against the project, at least in the meeting, if perhaps not publicly. Given the recent announcement of approval of export credit agency financing by Austria, Switzerland, and Germany, Altay said that the GOT would imminently start construction

of the dam on the Tigris River.

Turkey-Iraq Water VolVis - Again

¶4. (SBU) Asking that we resend the revised version of the program for the proposed Water VolVis, Altay expected that the MFA would look at it favorably. Noting that the MFA could not schedule participation of one of its professionals for the original two-week program, he opined that the ten-day core program might be acceptable. We cautioned that the timing would have to be readdressed and we could not guarantee that the budget was still available for 2007, given the passage of time. Altay also said that in his opinion the program would be more valuable if it included Syrian participants.

Environment Minister Cancels Trip to U.S.

¶5. (SBU) Altay confirmed that Environment Minister Osman Pepe had had to cancel his April 12-14 trip to the United States that was being organized by the U.S. Forest Service. Altay referred to political contingencies (the upcoming Presidential election by the Parliament) and said he hoped that the trip could be rescheduled.

Wilson